

Going on to College!

*Families In Schools
Los Angeles, California*

GOT College! empowers fifth- and sixth-grade students and their parents to make attending college an achievable goal. The program currently serves 714 students, 714 parents, 56 district leaders, 41 school staff members, and 105 community members. Families in Schools (FIS), a non-profit organization, designed the yearlong program, which integrates a curriculum implemented by teachers and parent educators, student-parent workshops, university field trips, conferences, and teacher mentor professional development opportunities. Through GOT College!, FIS aims to increase parents’:

- Belief that college can be a realistic expectation for their children;
- Knowledge about college requirements and financial aid options;
- Ability to monitor their children’s education and take action on their behalf; and
- Ability and confidence to communicate with teachers and school staff about their children’s learning.

First generation, low-income, college-bound students and their families in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), Local Districts B, H & F, participate in the program.

FIS developed GOT College! based on its success with the Mother/Daughter College Preparation Program, an initiative started at the University of Texas at El Paso in 1986 and successfully implemented in LAUSD Local District B since 2000. Beginning in 2002, a coed strategy was piloted in LAUSD, Local Districts H and F.

FIS organizational leaders provided program coordination, curriculum develop-

ment, and the facilitation of monthly teacher and parent educator meetings. District leaders organized teacher trainings. School staff facilitated program outreach efforts and conducted student/parent meetings. Teachers served as program facilitators and mentors.

To promote GOT College!, FIS led informational sessions for local districts, which then selected schools to participate. Principals received a letter of invitation outlining the program’s goals and objectives, and then attended a detailed orientation session. Each school site selected the teacher mentors. Teachers nominated student candidates who then submitted an application and went through an interview process. Parents received a specialized orientation to ensure their support.

GOT College! students attended workshops twice a month that focused on study habits, college entrance requirements, careers, and financial aid information. Parents had their own workshops with teachers twice a month to learn ways to support their child’s college plans. Students and parents participated in monthly joint sessions delivered by classroom teachers. In addition, the program co-sponsored Saturday conferences and educational university field-trips. At the end of the program, students and parents participated in a ceremony highlighting the participants’ accomplishments.

The total cost of implementation was \$85,800. Securing funding to support all components of the program posed quite a challenge. FIS applied for various private grants, procured funding from districts on a contracted basis, and garnered support from foundations and corporate partners.

An external evaluator conducted a two-year evaluation to assess the impact of the program by conducting student/parent surveys, focus groups, and teacher interviews. Event evaluations were also conducted at major educational functions. Findings indicated that participating students and parents had an increased knowledge of college requirements, parent and student communication about academics and college was higher, and students' motivation to succeed academically increased. As one parent commented, "I liked the conference because I learned important information about college." Individual event evaluations demonstrated a significant impact on the participants' attitude in deciding to attend a university. As a result of the program, a student stated, "Now I know about the opportunities to make my dreams come true."

GOT College! is creating a college-going culture within each school site, enhancing teacher and parent relationships, and creating a strong pool of parent leaders and advocates. In addition, the participating districts are expanding their college preparation outreach programs and enhancing their parent involvement initiatives. Teachers are increasing their capacity to work with parents, and parents are gaining the necessary knowledge and confidence to help their children succeed academically.

Families in Schools will continue to increase the program's effectiveness. The program curriculum will expand to include a mathematics and science component.

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